

Immigrant Children and *The Arrival*

Evelyn Arizpe, Teresa Colomer and Carmen Martínez-Roldán, eds. 2014. *Visual Journeys Through Wordless Narratives*. London&NewYork: Bloomsbury Academic. 272 pp. ISBN: 978-1-7809-3758-8

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Visual Journeys Through Wordless Narratives makes a detailed inquiry into an international project which focuses on Shaun Tan's picturebook *The Arrival* and the effect it has on immigrant children. The aim of the research was to find out in what ways participation in visual response strategies and discussions of wordless postmodern texts supports recent immigrant children as readers (5). The research was carried out in three international contexts led by research teams in Glasgow, Arizona, and Barcelona. The first part of the book deals with the theoretical framework and choice of methods used in the project. The second part presents the findings from the inquiry, including transcripts of readers' responses and group discussions. The third part offers an overview of types of mediation used to interpret *The Arrival*, as well as recommended reading strategies for teachers. Throughout the book, the emphasis is on readers' meaning-making of the wordless narrative, elicited by researchers-mediators during a series of literary sessions.

The book starts by acknowledging all the contributors who participated in the research. In the introduction, the authors write about the point of departure of their research, or, as they call it, their "journey". Social, economic and political problems in the world today cause migration, and host countries struggle with the inclusion of immigrant children in schools. While educationalists explore new theories of language to respond to their needs, one of the least explored ideas in education is the use of visual images. Most children from different countries today are greatly exposed to visual culture and the authors suggest building on that knowledge, and using it in language and literacy learning.

In the first chapter, the authors discuss the contextual and theoretical frameworks needed for a better understanding of the educational needs of immigrant children. Some of the topics mentioned are globalisation and migration, visual literacy and language, and the role of wordless picturebooks in education. The authors stress the benefits of reading wordless picturebooks, such as the development of an active literary response, inciting the imagination, and activating intercultural and intertextual knowledge.

Three international contexts, Glasgow, Catalonia, and the US state of Arizona, are described in the second chapter. The differences and similarities between the research groups are presented in a social, historical and educational context. The variables in each country and the diversity of participants forced the research teams to abandon a comparative study model to focus on a more flexible research design.

The third chapter describes the setting of the initial research design, bearing in mind the different backgrounds of immigrant pupils. While the basic structure of the design remained similar enough to allow comparisons among international contexts, the variations in the design led to some discrepancies. For example, the Barcelona and Glasgow teams included non-immigrant participants in some sessions, and the languages in which mediators communicated with participants varied depending on the context. In selecting children, the mediators aspired to meet the following criteria: children having had their

primary education interrupted by a journey to another country, 10–12 years of age, having spent no more than three years in the host country, a diversity of countries of origin, gender balance (if possible), and willingness to participate in the study.

The research methodology combined elements of using images to elicit responses and analysing images made by children with observation and interviews. The selected wordless narratives included *Flotsam* by David Wiesner (2006) and *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (2006). *Flotsam*, a short and colourful wordless picturebook chosen because of its relative simplicity, was used to introduce the idea of “looking” to the participants. The main wordless narrative used in the study was *The Arrival*, a complex wordless picturebook, often classified as a wordless graphic novel, which covers the theme of migration. The researchers used various techniques to elicit oral responses to the visual text, such as an introductory “walkthrough” reading of the picturebook, semi-structured interviews, and literary discussions with groups of children. Each team mediated discussions according to the time available and the comprehension pace of the readers. The goal was to support dialogue and co-creation of meaning through an exchange of ideas among the readers. Annotation of images was another technique carried out in the Barcelona and Glasgow research groups, where children were encouraged to write comments, notes, dialogues and thought bubbles for characters in the images. The visual response method included creating visual artefacts through sessions of drawing and of taking photographs. All these methods were designed to include creativity and further draw students into the narrative, in order to form more detailed and comprehensive responses.

The second part of the book introduces a deeper insight into discussions between participants, offering discussion transcripts, children’s drawings and text annotations. An important conclusion that stems from chapter 4 is that children’s understanding of the narrative is based on personal migrant experience. Some of the difficulties the participants experienced are separation from family members, stress of migration, bureaucratic difficulties, language barriers and a sense of personal identity in the new country. All these challenges affected the way immigrant children read and comprehended the narrative. The discussions provided the children native of the host countries who participated in the study with feelings of empathy and understanding for their classmates’ and other immigrants’ stories. The participants displayed awareness of socio-economic and socio-political factors that influence migrations.

In chapter 5, the authors explain the referential system the three teams used to analyse the children’s statements. The children’s inferences about the plot, setting and characters were included, as were the children’s interpretations of text through the creation of dialogue and parallel texts. The children made conclusions about the narrative by looking forward and backward in the book, listening to feedback from peers, choosing from multiple possible explanations, searching for more clues, and answering mediators’ questions and follow-up comments.

Chapter 6 deals with identifying all the intertextual links the children managed to detect. The complexity of Tan’s visual narrative disoriented the participants. They had to focus on every kind of media and cultural and historical references in the picturebook to apprehend the narrative. Chapter 7 explains how visual affordances form readers’ responses. The analysis is divided into two parts, the first dealing with the wordless nature

of *The Arrival*, and the second with the visual and verbal peritext, colour, panels, frames, perspective, symbolism and the complex combination of reality and fantasy.

The third part of the book starts with chapter 8, in which the authors discuss the types of mediation used to interpret *The Arrival*. Some questions the mediators asked the children are described, together with the interaction the children achieved during the literary sessions.

The final chapter claims that the findings of the study could be used for the better inclusion of immigrant children into school systems. Image-based narratives, often overlooked in school curricula, contribute to the intellectual advancement of all pupils, so teachers should include as much imagery in their teaching as possible. The authors offer some strategies for literary understanding of image-based narratives. The chapter ends with a commentary by some teachers who participated in the inquiry.

The book's coda, *A (Visual) Journey to Italy*, describes the findings that researchers from the University of Bologna reported after replicating the study in Italy. After the study was conducted, the participating immigrant children highlighted the amount of new Italian words they had learned through group discussions, which also helped improve their self-esteem. This shows that reading wordless picturebooks helps immigrant students overcome the language barrier and boosts their confidence.

This book is a valuable and interesting read for every teacher, scholar and student in the field of children's literature, as well as scholars from other fields such as psychology, pedagogy and education. Well-organised and understandable to a wide audience, the book offers insights into the way children convey meaning from such intricate wordless narratives. As Shaun Tan himself says in the foreword, children tend to look carefully at concrete details in pictures, whereas adults are often overly preoccupied with understanding meaning (xiv). Imaginative ideas and emphatic responses combined with a deep understanding of the characters' feelings show the vast potential of a child's imagination when steered in the right direction.

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The Hidden World of Tove Jansson

Tuula Karjalainen. 2016. *Tove Jansson: Work and Love*. Trans. David McDuff. London: Penguin Random House. 304 pp. ISBN: 9781846148484

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Tove Jansson: Work and Love will surprise! As the life of this cherished and renowned picturebook creator unfolds, it is clear that the children's books for which she is so famous were only a small part of her work. Tove Jansson did in fact only produce three picturebooks, which she created alongside her Moomin stories and numerous lesser known artistic works, including cartoon strips, stamps, theatre productions, films, adult novels and her greatest love – paintings. David McDuff's translation of Tuula Karjalainen's book was brought out by Penguin in the UK in 2016 to coincide with two major London exhibitions about this famous writer/illustrator: one at the Southbank Centre and the other at the Dulwich Picture Gallery. Both of these focus quite heavily on Jansson's artistic talents as, according to Karjalainen, Tove Jansson dreamed of becoming an artist of renown although she later had to come to terms with the fact that her fame was eventually due to her children's books.